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Samuel Barber's Knoxville:
Summer of 1915: Its Textual
Setting.

Essay. Applied Music (voice)

THE UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

SAMUEL BARBER'S KNOXVILLE: SUMMER OF 1915:
ITS TEXTUAL SETTING

by

Sandra Babbel

AN ESSAY

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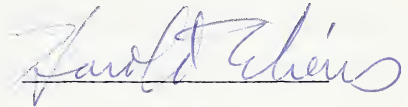
THE UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH

The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research, for acceptance, an essay entitled SAMUEL BARBER'S KNOXVILLE: SUMMER OF 1915: ITS TEXTUAL SETTING submitted by Sandra Babbel in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Music in Applied Music.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "C. Lewis", written over a horizontal line.

Supervisor

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Harold E. Lewis", written over a horizontal line.



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From boyhood, Samuel Barber was surrounded by a music-making environment. His mother was a talented pianist; his aunt, the famous opera contralto, Louise Homer; and her husband, a composer of songs. Samuel was born into this prosperous and cultured family on March 9, 1910. He began studying the piano at six years of age, and one year later produced his first composition, entitled Sadness. The melancholy musical atmosphere he achieved remained a lovely trait of his music.

Neither of Samuel's parents strongly encouraged him to pursue music as a career. In fact, they were eager to help him find other interests by directing him towards friends and sports. At about the age of eight Samuel left the following note on his mother's dresser: "To begin with, I was not meant to be an athlete. I was meant to be a composer, and will be, I'm sure... Don't ask me to try to forget this and go play football, please! Sometimes I've been worrying about this so much that it makes me mad! (not very.)"¹

When he was ten Samuel designed a full-length opera to a text written by the family's Irish cook, and at twelve he received his first job as organist in a West Chester church. The salary of one hundred dollars a month bought him a subscription to the concerts of the Philadelphia

Orchestra. But Barber soon lost his job for refusing to play unindicated fermatas in hymns.²

While attending high-school, Samuel played for the director of the Peabody Conservatory in Baltimore, Harold Randolph. Randolph told Samuel of the opening of the Curtis Institute of Music and encouraged him to drop out of school and apply. Without leaving high-school, Barber became a charter student of the Institute. He studied piano with George Boyle, who wrote on Samuel's report card, "Only fourteen. Technically not far advanced yet but very extraordinary gift for composition."³

Samuel's prodigious talents allowed him to major in piano, composition, and voice. His training was relatively conservative and he never completely abandoned the forms and techniques of his schooling.

It was in 1928 that Rosario Scalero, the composition teacher at Curtis, told Samuel that a gifted seventeen-year old Italian was coming to study at the Institute. Since this new student spoke French but not English, and since Barber spoke French, Scalero hoped that Barber would be friendly to the newcomer.⁴ Thus began Samuel Barber's enduring, close relationship with Gian-Carlo Menotti.

In that same year Barber won the Bearn's Prize of Columbia University for his violin sonata. This allowed him to travel to Europe, from where he wrote his parents, "Our whole life is so unreal and so drenched by fantasy that I move around thinking--unconsciously absorbing, but never collecting or arranging my reactions."⁵ He won the same prize again in 1933. These were the first of many rewards received, including a Pulitzer Travelling Scholarship, the Priz de Rome, the New York Music Critics' Circle award, and two Pulitzer Prizes. In 1935, the great Toscanini honored the composer by conducting the first performance of his Adagio for Strings.

Barber travelled to Vienna, Rome, St. Wolfgang near Salzburg, London, and Paris for continued training. But he had hardly arrived in Paris in 1939, when all Americans were warned to leave. The war, of course, interrupted Barber's career. He was inducted into the Army in 1943 and later was allowed to compose music commissioned by the Army Air Forces. When his services ended in 1945, he and Menotti chose to return to "Capricorn," their home in the country about one hour out of New York City. All of Barber's compositions from Opus 19 on were written at "Capricorn."

When Barber died in New York on January 23, 1981, he left a large estate. To Gian-Carlo Menotti he left at least one third of a million dollars as well as books, tapes, his memoirs, and the life-time use of their home; but more important, to the world he left the superlative gift of his music.

Perhaps the fact that Samuel Barber studied singing as a young man accounts for his extraordinary understanding of vocal music. He came into contact with great singers and learned to appreciate them at a very early age. Barber even pursued a professional career as a singer, training in Vienna and giving recitals. Although he soon decided to devote all of his talent to composition, he kept on "singing" in his songs. He revealed his talent early when he issued a set of three songs between 1927 and 1928: (Opus 2) "Daisies" (James Stephens), "With Rue My Heart is Laden," (A.E. Housman), and "Bessie Bobtail," (Stephens). Dover Beach (Opus 3), a setting for string quartet and singer, was introduced on March 5, 1933 by Rose Bampton and the New York String Quartet. Opus 10 is a collection of songs of which Nathan Broder says, "The despair of the grave and the lovely romantic lines is mirrored in the romantic music, whose deep sadness glows in the quiet strings."⁷ The songs of his early days were already lyrically refined but those of his maturity heighten the lyricism with a greater har-

monic intensity. On October 30, 1953, Leontyne Price and Samuel Barber performed his Hermit Songs in Washington. The poems, translated from anonymous Irish texts by monks and scholars of the eighth and thirteenth centuries, struck Barber with their freshness and delightful innocence. A technical peculiarity of this set is the lack of time signatures so that the music will reflect the irregular prose rhythms. Without question, the rhythmic flexibility developed by the prose text of Knoxville served as a useful preliminary to the problems posed by the Hermit Songs.

Samuel Barber understood the voice. The fluidity and intensity of his music, coupled with an overtone of frustration and melancholy, contributes to the character of his style. Though Barber has been labeled a "neo-romantic,"⁸ "his music is not neo-anything."⁹ His music does not take any trend to the extreme, nor follow the fashions of the hour. He was content to remain an individual, not a disciple of his contemporaries. That his music was so generously accepted in a time of increasing avant-garde influence is evidence of his uncommon ability. (For a complete list of Barber's solo vocal works see Appendix.)

Knoxville: Summer of 1915, an eighteen-minute through-composed work for soprano and orchestra, is one of Barber's most atypical vocal works. It was commissioned,

sung, and first recorded by Eleanor Steber in 1949. Barber, an avid lover of literature, read the long prose poem by James Agee in The Partisan Reader¹⁰ when he was thinking about a work for voice and orchestra for Eleanor. At that time Barber's father was very ill and near death. Samuel was moved by the text in which the impressions of a young child lying on rough wet grass are vividly recorded. The prose poem later became the preface to James Agee's novel, A Death in the Family, in which a typical family in Knoxville, Tennessee laments the father's death.

There is little doubt that such a lengthy composition in one movement with a prose text could present problems, but, because of Barber's careful selection of the text and his attitude toward the words chosen, the work is a brilliant success. "When I'm writing music for words," he stated in 1971, "then I immerse myself in those words and I let the music flow out of them."¹¹

Barber was always extremely careful with his choice of texts. He understood the implicit meaning as well as the explicit sense in the words of poets like James Joyce, Emily Dickinson, Gerard Manley Hopkins, and Stephen Spender. He most likely was attracted to the colors and setting of James Agee's text for the same reason. The small town atmosphere of Knoxville, Tennessee probably

reminded Barber of his home in West Chester, Pennsylvania.

One is impressed at once by James Agee's skill in awakening particular feelings. The underlying sense of the words is much more striking than their literal meaning. It appears that Agee's intention was not simply to narrate events, but also to recreate with his imagery a particular and highly personal atmosphere.

The text is actually a long prose poem in which the remembrance of childhood provides a symbolic frame of reference.

We are talking now of summer evenings in
Knoxville Tennessee in the time that I lived
there so successfully disguised to myself as
a child.

The opening sentence immediately contrasts the literal reality of the setting with the unreality of "disguise." Perhaps there are no children, but only disguised adults. Perhaps all those adults to whom problems in life are unresolvable become children once again. Or perhaps there are no adults, only disguised children. Whatever the case, there seems to be a blurring of identity and a contrast of present with past. The entire passage carries with it this absence of distinction. The child's later struggle with the concept of death seems to be part of this central

problem. The large question of death and dying dwarfs us all. This sense of being overwhelmed is displayed in the expression of his childishness. The character is small ("All my people are larger bodies than mine.") and passive ("After a little I am taken in...Sleep draws me...Who quietly treat me..."). One has a sense of the child's removal from the family with these words. The child is very different from the others. His realization of this isolation causes a deep sense of loneliness.

It has become that time of evening when people sit on their porches, rocking gently and talking gently and watching the street and the standing up into their sphere of possession of the trees, of birds hung havens, hangars. People go by; things go by. A horse, drawing a buggy, breaking his hollow iron music on the asphalt; a loud auto: a quiet auto: people in pairs, not in a hurry, scuffling, switching their weight of aestival body, talking casually, the taste hovering over them of vanilla, strawberry, pasteboard, and starched milk, the image upon them of lovers and horsemen, squared with clowns in hueless amber.

"Summer evenings in Knoxville, Tennessee" are evenings of tradition, simplicity, and the timelessness of the hills. This is the home of a boy, Rufus Follet, his sister, Catherine, and their parents, Jay and Mary Follet. The eloquence of this first section is found in the choice of words. There is softness in words like "rocking gently" and in the alliteration "hung haven, hangars." The child's perception in this passage could be viewed as a glance

upward from the natural or physical world to the supernatural or spiritual realm. He sees the street and the people, then looks upwards towards the trees and birds and finally views the havens and hangers. There is a sense that the child is beginning to look beyond his small world and behold the greater breadth as he enters the consciousness of spiritual questions. This process of perception actually gives the overall form of the text. The contrast is that of simplicity in the child's physical life with the unresolvable spiritual issue of loss.

The rhythm of the language in this first section reflects the meaning of the words. The movement is gentle and unhurried. Life is uneventful and altogether familiar. Prosody of the following line gives a sense of the rhythm in Agee's choice of words which makes for a delightfully gentle response within the listener:

rocking gently and talking gently...

People are "not in a hurry," and their sluggish bodies stroll in an aimless direction. The pace is very slow. Agee's skillful choice of words with soft consonants such as "hollow...hovering..." and long vowels such as "aestival, starched milk," and "auto," as well as images like "hovering over them" and "hueless amber" gives a sense of removal from the literal scene, to the almost unearthly.

All that was tranquil changes in an instant:

A streetcar raising its iron moan; stopping; belling and starting, stertorous; rousing and raising again its iron increasing moan and swimming its gold windows and straw seats on past and past and past, the bleak spark crackling and cursing above it like a small malignant spirit set to dog its tracks; the iron whine rises on rising speed; still risen, faints; halts; the faint stinging bell; rises again, still fainter; fainting, lifting, lifts, faints foregone: forgotten.

The streetcar with its clashing iron wheels, a thrilling door to the great unknown outside world, is a fast-moving product of modern technology. What a stark contrast to the previous atmosphere! Words like "stopping, belling, starting," and "sterterous" are curt and brisk. The loud siren-like noise is heard in words "rousing and raising again its iron increasing moan." There is a sense of great friction and dissonance. But just as quickly as the frightening pace rises to an alarming speed, it begins to faint away. Soon all that is left is the quiet evening light:

Now is the night one blue dew. Now is the night one blue dew, my father has drained, he has coiled the hose. Low on the length of lawns, a frailing of fire who breathes...Parents on porches: rock and rock. From damp strings morning glories hang their ancient faces. The dry and exalted noise of the locusts from all the air at once enchants my eardrums.

The former atmosphere returns again as the parents go back



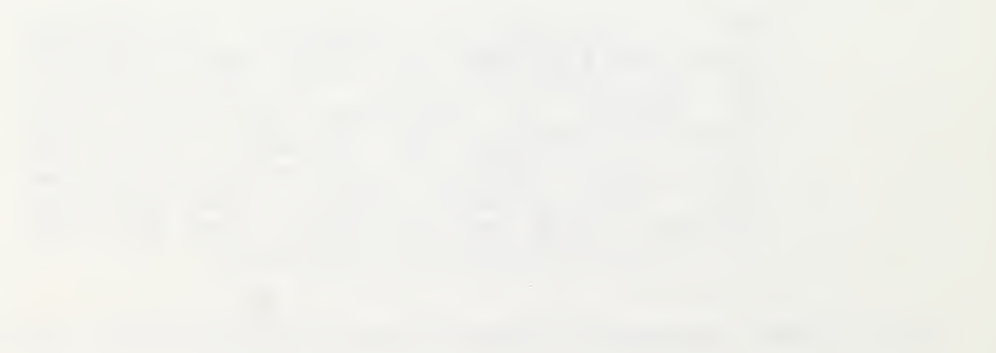
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to their rocking. Nature's night sounds take precedence over the interrupting clamor. It seems as though the overwhelming passing noise has somehow drawn new attention to the now enchanting sounds of a certain silence.

Perhaps one could view the blue due as the dusk before bed-time. Sleep, the symbol of death, is quickly approaching. The father is finishing his work and there is the sense that perhaps the child is getting rather drowsy. Melancholy nostalgia seems to set in as the child is drawn in by bigger thoughts than he.

On the rough wet grass of the back yard my father and mother have spread quilts. We all lie there, my mother, my father, my uncle, my aunt, and I too am lying there... They are not talking much, and the talk is quiet, of nothing in particular, of nothing at all in particular, of nothing at all.

Over the next group of hills, frequently visiting relatives have their home. To a child, the conversation of adults is rather meaningless and their voices seem to blend into one another in a comforting ensemble. This is perhaps the most naive section of the prose. The child is not interested in the discussion of the adults and he lets his mind wander to different thoughts:

The stars are wide and alive, they seem each like a smile of great sweetness, and they seem very near. All my people are larger bodies than mine,...with voices gentle and meaningless like the voices of sleeping

birds. One is an artist, he is living at home. One is a musician, she is living at home. One is my mother who is good to me. One is my father who is good to me. By some chance, here they are, all on this earth; and who shall ever tell the sorrow of being on this earth, lying, on quilts, on the grass, in a summer evening, among the sounds of the night. May God bless my people, my uncle, my aunt, my mother, my good father, oh, remember them kindly in their time of trouble; and in the hour of their taking away.

A glance upward towards the stars suggests the recognition of the very reality of spirituality in the passage.

The climax of James Agee's book is the death of Jay Follet, the boy's father. Coming home from a frustrating trip, Jay ignores the religious signs of doom on the roadside and drives recklessly until a steering pin is broken and his car motors into a ditch. There is a sense of foreshadowed tragedy as the child prays that his parents will be blessed "in the hour of their taking away." The strength of the phrase is that it brings to consciousness those remembered or anticipated moments of anguish. There are no answers for the child. There is no resolution to the question of grief and loss. Only a final emptiness creates the deepest human expression:

After a little I am taken in and put to bed. Sleep, soft smiling, draws me unto her: and those receive me, who quietly treat me, as one familiar and well-beloved in that home: but will not, oh, will not, not now, not ever; but will not ever tell me who I am.

The child who seems at once most insignificant finds himself drawn to sleep, the symbol for death, and he resolves that no one will ever be able to pretend that there is any answer to so deep a spiritual loss.

To Agee's connotative text Barber adds an emotional overtone which seemingly represents his own feelings, and conveys the atmosphere of the text through the transformation of the words into sounds. It is interesting to note in what ways Samuel Barber sets the text of Knoxville: Summer of 1915 so that the synthesis of the words and music is greater than the sum of their individual parts.¹³ In exploring the music as related to the text "we shall find that the musical illumination of experience may attain to the vividness of metaphor--that music may appear to the sentient listener as the very stuff, not of experience as it is factually seen and intellectually known, but of experience as it lives, largely as an emotional response to factual encounter, in our minds."¹⁴ Although verbal definition of the sensory experiences caused by the music is difficult if not impossible, the exposition of particular examples will display a greater and more vivid communication than the text might on its own.

Of course, Barber allowed for very literal settings of the text in a number of places. Obvious examples are the

dynamics corresponding with "a loud auto, a quiet auto," and "the talk is quiet." As the whine of the streetcar "faints," so does the dynamic of voice and instruments. A lovely reflection of the text corresponds to the words "people in pairs" where flutes in two parts play a motive of eighth-note couplets. The motive descends nonchalantly while the use of the light instruments reflects carefree spirits. The music seems to be as sluggish as those strolling:



Hovering tastes (and smells) are delightfully depicted by using a G^b instead of the consonant G#. The G# might have seemed too far removed whereas the G^b forces its way back down to the F#, denoting a hovering closeness.

m. 24

3

p

ual-ly, — the taste hov-'ring o-ver them of va-nil-la,

cantando

2

There are occasional deviations from exact speech rhythm for enhanced word-painting. Three times in the work short melismatic patterns effectively express the respective words in the vocal line. The first occurs with the "moan" of the streetcar as it passes by:

8 m. 66

moan

The second melisma appears with the words "rises again" depicting the bell of the streetcar:



The final melismatic occasion "draws" the child to sleep with an alluring motive:



Barber's word painting techniques are one way in which the text is enhanced by the music, but there is much more than literal text-setting to give the text its added dimension.

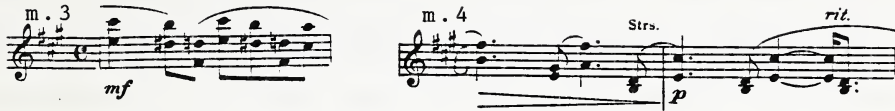
By using the first line of prose as an introduction, whether printed in the program or spoken, Barber enhances the affective set of the listener with the place and time of the narrative before any music is heard. "We are talking now of summer evenings in Knoxville, Tennessee at the time when I lived there so successfully disguised to myself as a child." The comment focuses the attention on a mood of nostalgic reminiscence. "The flow of association and the arousal of imagery stimulates an otherwise free-

wandering mind."¹⁵ As the introduction begins, the music carries the sense of the opening text. The opening chord is unconventional because its inverted position results in an open fifth in the upper voices. The "disguised" identity of the child is reflected in the disguised opening harmonic progression. There is a reference to a plagal key relationship, and uncertainty of tonic, as an oboe casts a most unlikely emphasis on B-major within a F-sharp minor key reference. The fourth-chords are not so clear in their tonal implications as triads would be. The change from F-sharp minor to B-major corresponds to a heightened awareness of reality. This key relationship happens only once again, at the climax of the work, where the child realizes the deepest distress.



Barber was a slow composer. He was careful, often diligently searching for a precise theme in a musical composition. The rising contour of the opening motive of the work implies contemplation, which is reflected also by the inversion of a second from measure three to a seventh

in measures four and five.



The lyricism, the evocative coloring, and the great freedom in the handling of tonality are evident throughout the rest of the work.

The form of Knoxville is as follows:

(INTRODUCTION) A¹ B A² C (INTERLUDE: LIKE INTRO.) A³

Why did Barber choose this design for his setting? We have seen above that distinct divisions are evident in Agee's prose, juxtaposing ordinary life with larger spiritual thoughts and ideas. Barber's musical units correspond to the divisions of the text. Section A represents the tradition of small town life while sections B and C are contrasting. The places of greatest contemplation are the

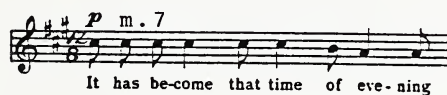
second half of B and the second half of C.

Barber's feeling of form is closely tied to the past and rooted in traditional principles. The rondo form can be traced as far back as the medieval rondel of the troubadours. It was used by French composers of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, by Bach, Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven, Berlioz, and others.

After the introduction, a rocking 12/8 rhythm begins the A¹ section. The sense of the words is restful and peaceful. Simple childhood experiences are depicted in a benign effortlessness. There is a shift from the large world of the introduction into a small world in itself--the world of a child--peaceful and soft. These words are heightened by musical characteristics.

One characteristic of this section is the slow pace. The rocking 12/8 melody begins at a restful lounging rate. "Rocking gently," is exactly what the music is doing. The motion is not rhythmically marked or rapid. There is an unhurried melodic, rhythmic and harmonic flow. There is also a very slow introduction of new or dissonant pitches. This makes for few surprises and thus a very stable atmosphere.

Another characteristic of section A¹ is Barber's use of motives. "An initial motive," explains Hans Nathan, "provides musical and psychological unity. It carries as well a variety of meanings: it suggests the patter of the child; it indicates...the restfulness of the hour...: and like a fragment of a folk tune, evokes the locale...The motive then transforms itself easily into what seems to be a recognizable melody (reminiscent of the music of the Southern Appalachian Mountains) but the prattling character of the story remains."¹⁶ The opening melodic line in the voice is simply a $\overset{\wedge}{3} \overset{\wedge}{2} \overset{\wedge}{1}$ progression, basic and diatonic. There is a relatively flat melodic contour. A slight tension is built with the repeated note only to fall away in the effortless descent.



This motive appears three times in the work, each time denoting the youthful character. It is often sung with a white color enhancing the childish sense. Another use of motive to describe the mood is that portraying the image of a glance upward from the street to the trees, to birds hovering in the sky.

"watching the street and the standing up
into the sphere of possession of the trees,
of birds hung havens, hangars."

This glance is audible in this rising melodic motive:

m. 12

ses-sion of the trees, of birds' hung ha - vens, hang - ars.

Str. espr.

Fl.

m. 14

The glance being an upward one, a 7/8 measure interrupts
the general flow for a moment in which to contemplate:

m. 14

Fl.

The harmony in this section is a mixture of A-major and F-sharp minor. This may be referred to as a double tonic complex in which one or the other tonics is emphasized at different times.¹⁷ This gives section A¹ an ambiguous flavor; a realm in which things seem unclear.

Ferguson maintains that one of the elements of expression which links the listener with the experience described

by music is the tension of emotion and its correlative, rhythm. Most of the time signatures in section A (12/8, 9/8, 6/8) continue a triple meter pattern. This three-beat group is found in Barber's later song cycle, The Hermit Songs, in which "A Monk and His Cat" reveals an easy passing of time with its groups of three:

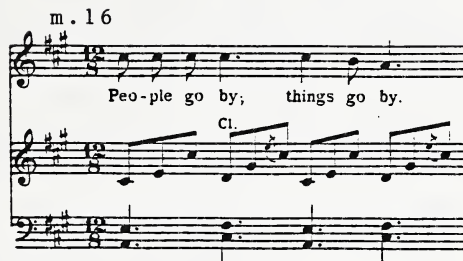


The ostinato bass heard in the downbeat of every three-beat group stabilizes the line:



At another point within the A¹ section, the rocking rhythm is altered by added grace notes making the rhythmic pattern,






At this point people, things, and clopping horses' hooves are heard on the asphalt. The music reflects the exact rhythm of the text. There is a natural emphasis upon syllables:

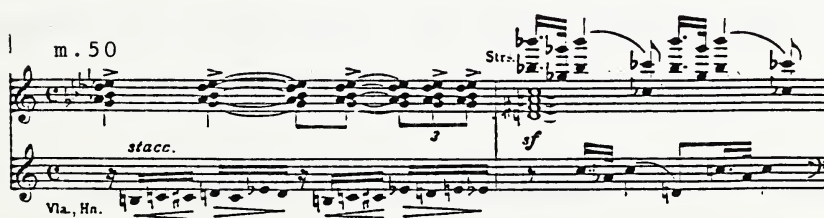
Hol - low iron music on the asphalt.

Barber allowed himself free shift of meter so that each word would receive appropriate stress. Later, in the Hermit Songs, he abandoned time signatures altogether.

"Sempre legato" strings denote warmth and refinement as does the solo flute in the time of reflection. The oboe and french horn are also appropriate instruments for the section because of their smooth appealing timbre. Thus, Barber's careful orchestration often emphasizes the underlying theme.

Suddenly the mood is disrupted. The B section possesses a completely different atmosphere. From a mood of serenity, we move to a text with short, biting sounds and rapid monosyllabic words. The modern, technical image of the streetcar contrasts greatly with the old-fashioned living of the first section.

The noticeable means by which the music reflects the text in the B section is an intense rhythmic agitation. Running sixteenth notes give the notion of the churning on the track. A perpetual upsetting rhythmic pattern ushers in the moan of the passing streetcar:  .



Barber has allowed the text to determine the musical rhythm as the "bleak spark, crackling and cursing..." is greatly

emphasized with the pizzicato, irregular pattern. One can almost hear the electric sparks of the streetcar antenna.

m. 72 *p staccato*

the bleak spark crack - ling and curs - ing a -

p muted Tpt.

Whereas triple meter sustained the tranquility of section A, common time, 7/8, cut time, 5/4 and various other sporadic shifts dominate section B.

The second half of the B section begins to slow the pace down. Yet repercussions of the rhythmic motive, *ATT*, sustain the uneasiness and cast a tainted light on the returning quiet evening.

There is also an interesting dissonance in section B. The rate of introduction of new dissonant pitches is frantic, almost overwhelming. One can see that Barber's composition, although traditional, can quickly turn pungent and acidic when the emotional content or mood calls for a harsher sound.

The first two bars of section B include clashing seconds, the harshest dissonance to the ear:

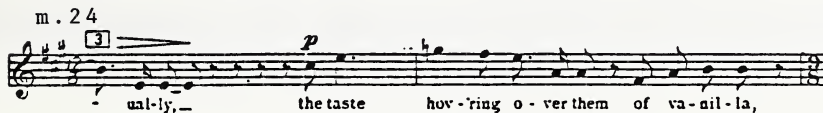


The tonic changes so quickly in the section that it is extremely difficult to follow and is further obscured by the highly chromatic texture.

Orchestration is different also. The bright brass and woodwinds fill this section with an unnerving clamor. Extremely high sounds from the piccolo agitate the listener. In general, the section is noisy and rambunctious.

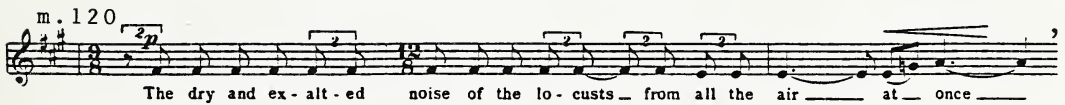
Harmonically, Barber set up lovely tensions within the second half of the B section. This being one of the most contemplative portions of the work, intervallic tensions create a great expression of grief. A F-pedal point appears as a temporary tonic but a simultaneous C-major chord is heard. This ambiguity of tonic coincides with the obscurity of dusk's light and the thoughts of the child. A most enchanting pivot chord is heard at the word "blue." This is one of those sounds that defies functional description. The chord, an altered dominant of A, creates

Section A² shares a number of musical characteristics with A¹. Barber uses recurrent themes to portray the mood which first appeared at the beginning of the song. The sense of smell is involved in the A¹ text: "the taste hovering over them of vanilla." In section A² a phrase about morning glories evokes another smell, that of blooming flowers. Because both are distinct odors, Barber uses the same motive:



Other similarities include the triple meter, the slow pace, and the paired tonics of F#-minor and A-major.

A difference between the section is their lengths. A² is much shorter; the child does not remain in a young frame of mind for long. He is soon haunted by unanswerable questions once again. Another difference is in a seemingly greater strength of silence within A². It was mentioned above that the disappearance of the streetcar seemed to emphasize the returning sounds of the night. Barber portrays the quiet with an initially monotonal voice line that then rises to express the enchanting sounds of the locusts.

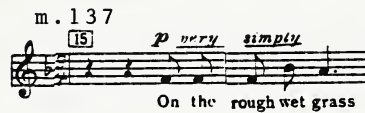


In this refrain the stabilizing ostinato bass is absent, making the section seem not quite so content and child-like. A harp plays a three-beat pattern which replaces the former ostinato.

Section C begins as the most consonant section of the entire piece, and provides a remarkable contrast with the climactic second part of the section. The adults are talking of "nothing in particular, of nothing at all." Harmonically the section is clearly in F-major. There is no problem hearing clear dominant, subdominant, and tonic chords, although they are softly dissonant. The simple

melodic descent of the vocal line is entirely diatonic. The depiction is that of conversation that is meaningless to the child.

The rhythm is very simple. The repetition of eighth notes in the opening vocal line is a good example of straightforwardness:



The dynamic marking is very soft as the adult dialogue fades into a dull sound.

m. 151 *mp casually*

of noth-ing at all in par-tic-u-lar, - of noth-ing at all.

pp *espr.*

Suddenly, it is as though the child has realized the greatness of the stars for the first time even though he

may have been staring at them for many nights. Barber moves to a minor key, a louder dynamic, and a slightly higher tessitura:

17 *mf* m. 156

stars are wide and a - live,

Fl., Harp *mf* *mp* Ob.

This is just for a moment, for the quietness returns. The adult discussion is at the foreground of the child's mind as he listens to their talk about jobs and life. But it is not long before the child's mind wanders off.

The second half of section C begins with the relentless plaguing of sorrow in the child's mind.

"By some chance here they are, all on this earth, and who shall ever tell their sorrow of being on this earth..."

Second and ninth intervals combine to intensify this climactic passage. The motive pleads for a reason, a purpose, some answer:

m. 183 ^[20] *piu agitato*

Tutti

f By some chance, here they are

The interlude following section C is the fervent prayer of the child whose only resolution seems to be no resolution. The words, "may God bless my people, my uncle, my aunt, my mother, my good father, Oh, remember them kindly in their time of trouble and in the hour of their taking away," is set to the motive of the introduction. This motive once again displays underlying melancholy. We hear it again at the end of the prayer intensified by full brass and then again by full orchestra.

m. 212 *moving ahead*

and in the hour of their ta-king a -

ff *cresc. molto*

[21] *ff* *bravely*

way. *full Brass* *molto espressivo* *Tutti*

Another motivic repetition for the introduction is heard in this context. This "questioning motive," rising in contemplation, is much larger this time in terms of orchestration, dynamic, and range.

m. 4 *Strs.* *rit.*

p

m. 222 *sfz.* *sfz.* *instr.*

The rondo refrain returns for the final time. In light of the previous section the return of A does not sound comforting. The contentment has somehow been crushed by hopelessness and emptiness. The isolation the child experiences, as a result of his decision that life is meaningless, is portrayed in the passive words, "who quietly treat me as one familiar and well beloved in that home. But will not, not now, not ever, but will not ever tell me who I am." The child no longer feels at home.

Whereas a conventional harmonic progression would perhaps be a more hospitable accompaniment for the word "home," Barber uses a chromatically shifted scale, portraying the child's discomfort:



The harmony continues with the paired tonics of F#-minor and A-minor, emphasizing the latter at the end.

The timbre and range of the instruments in the closing

three measures once again give a progression from low to high; the final glance upward:



Since notes, like words, have emotional connotations, music is in fact extra-musical, as poetry is extra-verbal. Barber's skillful craftsmanship, by means of which he expresses the atmosphere of the text and his own feelings is ultimately inexplicable. Knoxville: Summer of 1915 is much more than a narrative account of past events and we must be careful not to assign literal meanings to every sound. Still, a study of the music enhances our appreciation of Barber's skill in expanding the expressions of the text.

NOTES

¹Sabin, Robert, "Samuel Barber" The International Encyclopedia of Musicians, p.140.

²Broder, Nathan, Samuel Barber

³Ibid.

⁴Ibid.

⁵Ibid.

⁶For a brief overview of Barber's awards and those works or which they were received, see the New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians, p.134.

⁷Broder, Samuel Barber, p.61

⁸Ibid.

⁹As stated by Robert Horan, Modern Music, p.161.

¹⁰A collection of stories and articles excerpted from the periodical Partisan Review.

¹¹Broder, Nathan, "The Music of Samuel Barber," Musical Quarterly.

¹²See the text of Knoxville: Summer of 1915.

¹³For an interesting view of the assimilation of words and music see Susanne K. Langer's Feeling and Form, pp. 149 ff.

¹⁴Ferguson, Music as Metaphor, p.3.

¹⁵Mursell, The Psychology of Music, pp. 220 ff.

¹⁶Broder, Nathan, "The music of Samuel Barber," Musical Quarterly.

¹⁷Bailey, Robert, ed. Richard Wagner: Prelude and Transfiguration from Tristan and Isolde. NY: W.W. Norton, 1984, p.121.

APPENDIX

SAMUEL BARBER'S SOLO VOCAL WORKS

- (Opus #) 2 Three Songs: "The Daisies," (Stephens), 1927; "With Rue My Heart is Laden," (Houseman), 1928; "Bessie Bobtail," (Stephens), 1934.
- 3 Dover Beach: (Arnold), for mezzo/baritone and string quartet, 1931; New York, 5 March 1933.
- 10 Three Songs: (Joyce; Chamber Music): "Rain Has Fallen," "Sleep Now," "I Hear An Army," 1936: number three has been orchestrated.
- 13 Four Songs: "A Nun Takes the Veil," (Hopkins), 1937; "The Secrets of Old," (Yeats), 1938; "Sure on This Shining Night," (Agee), 1938; "Nocturne," (F. Prokosch), 1940; no. 2 performed New York, 12 February 1939; complete performance in New York, 17 April 1941.
- 18 Two Songs: "The Queens Face on a Summery Coin," (R. Horan), 1942; "Monks and Raisins," (J. Garcia Villa), 1943; number 2 performed in New York, 22 February 1944.
- 24 Knoxville: Summer of 1915: for soprano and orchestra, 1947; Boston, 9 April 1948.
- 25 "Nuvoletta," (Joyce), 1947.
- 27 Melodies Passageres: (Rilke), "Puisque tout passe," "Un cygne," "Tombeau dans un parc," "Le clocher chante," "Depart," 1950-51: numbers 1, 4-5 performed in Washington, D.C., April 1950; complete performance in New York, 10 February 1952.
- 29 Hermit Songs: (Irish texts of 8th-13th Centuries): "At Saint Patrick's Purgatory," (translated by S.O. O'Faolain), "Church Bell at Night," (translated by H. Mumford Jones), "St. Ita's Vision," (translated by Kaliman), "The Heavenly Banquet," (translated by O'Faolain), "The Crucifixion," (translated by Mumford

APPENDIX
(continued)

Jones), "Sea Snatch," "Promiscuity," "The Monk and His Cat," (translated by Auden), "The Praises of God," (translated by Auden), "The Desire for Hermitage," (translated by O'Faolin), 1952-3, Washington, D.C., 30 October 1953.

39 Andromaches Farewell: (from Euripides: The Trojan Women, translated by J.P. Creagh), for soprano and orchestra, 1962; New York, 4 April 1963.

41 Despite and Still: "A Last Song," (Graves), "My Lizard," (Roethke), "In the Wilderness," (Graves), "Solitary Hotel," (Joyce), "Despite and Still," (Graves), 1968-9; New York, 27 April 1969.

45 Three Songs: "Now I Have Fed and Eaten Up," (Keller, translated by Joyce), "A Green Lowland of Pianos," (J. Harasymowecz, translated by C. Milosz), "O Boundless, Boundless Evening," (G. Heym, translated by Middleton), 1972; New York, 30 April 1974.

from:

Jackson, Richard, "Barber, Samuel." The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians. ed. Stanley Sadie. 2 (1980): 133-6

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